

The distribution of the Masked Weaver *Ploceus velatus* in Angola

by W. R. J. Dean

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The Masked Weaver *Ploceus velatus* has a fairly restricted distribution in Angola. The species is mainly confined to semi-arid southern and southwestern Angola, and along the coastal plain below the escarpment from Namibe Province to about Luanda, Bengo Province.

In the course of preparing an annotated check-list of the birds of Angola, I have examined the records of *P. velatus* critically and have concluded that the Angolan distribution of *P. velatus* may be summarised as follows:- *Ploceus velatus finschi* is a common resident in riverine woodland in savanna and broad-leaved woodlands from southwestern Namibe Province north along the coastal plain to Luanda, generally west of 14°E; *P. velatus caurinus* occurs from the Namibian border through Cunene Province, southern and western Huila Province and western Benguela Province, generally south of 16°S, but extending north to about 12°S in the west (Clancey 1974). There are peculiarly isolated populations at Lakes Cameia (11°38'S, 20°54'E) and Dilolo (11°31'S, 22°02'E), Moxico Province, referred to *P. velatus tahatali* by Pinto (1965) but more likely to be *P. velatus shelleyi* (Louette 1984). Pinto (1965) considered *P. velatus* to be common in the area, at least around Lake Dilolo.

In a careful review of the identity of swamp-dwelling weavers in Angola, Louette (1984) concluded that some of the specimens collected by Pinto at L. Cameia and L. Dilolo and at present in the Centro de Zoologia, Lisbon, are *P. velatus*, probably *P. velatus shelleyi*. However, he was unable to examine the specimens collected at L. Dilolo and listed by Pinto (1965), since these are (presumably) in the collection of the Instituto de Investigação Científica de Angola (IICA) in Lubango, now inaccessible due to the civil war in Angola. The specimens may be in the collection at the Museu do Dundo (now Chitato) but, if so, are not listed by Pinto (1973).

The Lakes Cameia and Dilolo specimens apparently represent the furthest north occurrences of *P. velatus* in eastern Angola. The record of a breeding colony of *P. velatus* on the Luachimo River at Dundo (Chitato), Lunda Norte Province (Günther & Feiler 1986) is questionable. This record, if verified, would extend the distribution east and considerably north of any previous locality for *P. velatus* in Angola (see Map 331 in Hall & Moreau 1970). Benson *et al.* (1971) did not record *P. velatus* in northwestern Zambia, but it does occur throughout western Zambia, south of Lakes Cameia and Dilolo (R. J. Dowsett, pers. comm., citing unpublished Zambian atlas data). However, Schouteden (1964, 1965a, 1965b) did not record *P. velatus* in any of the districts of Zaire adjacent to northeastern Angola, so the Lakes Cameia and Dilolo populations of *P. velatus* would appear to be

truly isolated. In view of this isolation, it is imperative that breeding males of the *Ploceus* species at Lakes Cameia and Dilolo are collected and examined. Furthermore, the L. Cameia and L. Dilolo specimens were collected in reeds. If the birds are nesting in reeds at L. Cameia and L. Dilolo (unusual for *P. velatus*; see Clancey 1974, Louette & Benson 1982), it is even more important that the identity of the Cameia and Dilolo specimens be firmly established. It is possible that the birds may be a new taxon of swamp-dwelling weaver, larger than the *P. reichardi* group (suggested by M. Louette, *in litt.*).

It seems certain that the breeding colony of weavers on the Luachimo River observed by Günther & Feiler (1986) was not *P. velatus*. No specimens of the breeding birds were collected, and there is no other evidence to support the identification of the breeding birds as *P. velatus* (R. Günther pers. comm., A. Feiler *in litt.*). The only black-faced weaver known to occur in northern Lunda Norte is *P. cucullatus* (Traylor 1963), but *P. melanocephalus duboisi* has been recorded at Lusambo, Sankuru District, Zaire (Schouteden 1964) and could occur in Lunda Norte. The only other masked weavers that could conceivably be confused with *P. velatus* in the field are *P. intermedius* and *P. pelzelni*, neither of which occurs anywhere near northern Lunda Norte. Furthermore, the locality of the breeding colony is in an area where the mean annual precipitation exceeds 1400 mm. *Ploceus velatus* tends to be a species widespread in arid regions (Clancey 1974), and, with the exception of the isolated population in Moxico Province, is apparently restricted to the area of Angola where the mean annual precipitation is <400 mm. The distribution of *P. velatus* in Angola is thus substantially that shown by Clancey (1974), and supported by Louette (1984). *Ploceus velatus* is unlikely to occur in northeastern Angola.

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Amazona kawalli is a valid name for a valid species

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Grantsau & Camargo (1989) gave the name *Amazona kawalli* to a form of parrot very close to the Mealy Amazon *A. farinosa* but which they judged to possess several distinctive diagnostic features. The new form was described on the basis of one dead captive bird, two live captive birds, and two old, misattributed museum specimens. Vuilleumier *et al.* (1992) implied that Grantsau & Camargo (1990) provide additional data in a table of measurements, but in fact these measurements are present, albeit not in tabular form, in the original description.

This unusual circumstance (descriptions of new species of parrot are not frequent) resulted in modest publicity (e.g. Low 1990, Anon. 1991, Arndt 1991) but not outright acceptance. Vuilleumier *et al.* (1992) felt that "there is not enough evidence at present to decide what the status of this form is", and listed it as a *species inquirenda*. More emphatically, Bosch (1991), having first speculated whether subspecific rank would not be more appropriate, came to agree with the late H. E. Wolters (of Museum Koenig, Bonn, and a member of the Standing Committee on Ornithological Nomenclature of the International Ornithological Congress), to whom he referred the description, and who considered that *kawalli* merely represented individual variation within *A. farinosa*. This was also the judgement, quoted by Grantsau & Camargo (1989), of Pinto (1935; also Pinto & Camargo 1954), in whose care the two museum specimens of *kawalli* remained for many decades. Largely because of these doubts, and despite its inclusion by Sibley & Monroe (1993), who may not have been aware of the caution being expressed in some quarters, the new form was not considered in recent reviews of threatened species (Collar *et al.* 1992, 1994), despite its potential categorisation as Data Deficient or near-threatened. However, the problem was clearly of continuing concern in taxonomic, conservation and avicultural terms, so, with the discovery of two specimens